

Problems Encountered in High School Pupils, Who Have Divorced Parents

Merita Kollçaku

Tirana, Albania

Doi:10.5901/jesr.2017.v7n1p163

Abstract

Adolescence and the problems teenagers face during this phase have a great impact in the teaching process. Divorce is one of the problems I have chosen to treat. This is due to the fact that divorce impacts the social-psychological-educational process of teenagers. The ways they experience the divorce of their parents are various. This depends on the area they live, their parents' educational level, the relationship between parents after the divorce, the kind of relationship they had before, economic level, etc. Teenagers can display aggressive behaviour, disengage from learning, use various substances, etc. as a reaction to their parents. This is the object of my study. This research will use the qualitative method. The qualitative methods will consist in direct interviews with teenagers of the age-group of 14-18 years old, with teachers, psychologists and parents. Also consider those problems I might face during my study, on which the teenagers, or even their parents, might not express their opinion. As a conclusion we can say that based on the interviews it results that divorce has a great impact on the social-educational behaviour of teenagers.

Keywords: aggressive behaviour, divorce impact, learning, psycho-social development, teenager.

1. Introduction

Albania is a small country and since ancient times it greatly valued the family and in particular marriage. Divorce, as part of marriage, was conditioned by customary law and Albania's ancient canons precisely defined the reasons why the divorce could happen. Some of these reasons were lack of virginity, violation of conjugal fidelity, not having children, etc. (Canon of *Lekë Dukagjini* 1989:39). By the end of the Second World War, in the Albanian society prevailed the opinion and prejudice that considered divorce as something unaccepted (*Dervishi Zyhd* 2000: 141).

The Communist regime established after 1945 created a different environment and for the first time equality between men and women was established. Marriage and divorce were regulated by the Code of Family. It is worth mentioning that during that period the number of divorces was very low. This relates to the psychology of Albanians who always believed in the holiness of marriage and family, but also to the state policy to present moral degradation and crises of the Albanian families (*Beqaj, Sokolaj*: 45). The reasons of divorces during that period were mainly based on political causes. The deep economic-political-social changes after 1990 were greatly reflected in the Albanian families as well. In '91-'92 in particular there was an increased number of families with divorced parents. Long time consumed marriages, not divorced because of the consequences they would have in the individuals. (*Beqaj, Sokolaj*: 46). The causes of divorce are various: arranged marriages, the economic situation, emigration of husbands who never came back in their country, etc. Given that divorce was "a novelty" in the Albanian society, it had serious consequences in the development of both families and children.

Some of the studies conducted come to the conclusion that the divorce of parents is accompanied with some negative behaviors of adolescents. (*Journal of marriage and family* 2010; 7: 650-666). This behavior is accompanied with fear, anxiety, stress, lack of concentration, low self-esteem and low results at school. Makinde (2007b) describes adolescence as a life period between childhood and adulthood. The consequences of parents' divorce appear also in subsequent adulthood periods, such as early relations with a partner, lack of incomes, early marriages, divorce, etc. All these cause psycho-social and educative consequences for the adolescents.

The study is focused on teenagers aged 14-18 years old, as this is their most delicate age. During this age period the adolescents undergo fundamental changes, both in the physical and psycho-social-emotional aspects. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry describes adolescence as the most dynamic period of the individual's growth and development, accompanied by various serious changes. (*Ibegwam Ahiaom*: 2013). This age period needs care, attention, love and patience. The family and parents have a great impact in the formation of the adolescent. Parents should monitor their children and provide them with a good nurture and discipline. The stressful nature of a divorce experience increases the adolescent's chances of experiencing a wide variety of mental health problems, including

aggression, elevated anxiety, high rates of substance abuse and low self-esteem. In other words, the negative outcome of divorce may increase pre-existing differences in the family unit prior to the divorce itself. I considered very relevant the study of this age group, from the studies conducted on divorce it results that adolescents can understand the reasons of their parents' divorce, but they are faced with the fear for their own future. How much safe is their future? Which will be the emotional support of their parents? What about economic support? (which is considered very important for this age group). This makes that adolescents react in various ways to face the fear or panic they experience during this period. This is very much reflected in the education process as well. Normally, adolescents very often lose concentration, but when facing such problems they leave the class and find "shelter" in "inappropriate" behavior. This kind of adolescents' behavior is considered as a form of revenge for what is happening to them, not to the others. This makes them feel different from the others.

2. Operational Definitions

Adolescent- In this study adolescent is referring to an individual between fourteen and eighteen years of age.

Impact- Any change on the adolescent relationship during or after the divorce.

Divorce-Dissolution of marriage

3. Divorce and its impact in the psycho-social relations of the adolescent.

It is worth highlighting that the Albanian mentality has not accepted yet divorce as a last alternative remained to the couple. This brings about a great consequence, such as the conflictual separation of the ex partners. Because of this the adolescent is educated in the spirit that the parent who has left is guilty and the other parent blames him. Thus, the adolescent is grown up with the wrong perception on the "disloyal" parent and behaves inappropriately, such as isolation, lack of communication, anger, anxiety, parents' disinterest. This situation is as a result of several factors, such as:

1. We lack the culture to benefit from the psychological service
2. We lack the culture to attend family therapies in order to solve the problem.

This is because in Albania we have the alienation process, which means that most adolescents hide their problems and doing this they don't try to find the solutions to their problems.

Whereas from the psychological point of view the adolescent has a very low self-esteem and a low esteem for his own family. This is reflected in finding the ways for solution, such as the company of inappropriate persons, the use of harmful substances, such as alcohol, smoking and drugs and violent behavior as well (D'Onofrio Brian: 2011).

What are the relations between adolescents and their parents after divorce?

Most of them say that they don't have good relations. Only 35% of them say that they have good relations. This is also related to the age of the adolescent when his parents divorced.

4. Methodology

The methodology used is based on the qualitative method. Focus groups and interviews are the methods used. Interviews were made with pupils of public and not public high schools in Tirana, age group of 14-18 years old. Tirana has 26 not public high schools and 15 public high schools. 50 pupils were interviewed in total (boys and girls).

Participation in these focus groups was voluntary and confidential. They were previously informed on the purpose of the interviews and that they would be kept anonymous. I wholeheartedly thank all the pupils, teachers and psychologists for the willingness to share their thoughts.

The aim of the article: This study aims to identify the impact of divorce in the development of teenagers, both in the social and educational aspects. (*Age-group of 14-18 years old*).

4.1 Objectives of the study

1. Analyze the relation between divorce and psycho-social problems of adolescents.
2. Identify the relation between psycho-social problems and the learning process of adolescents.

4.2 This study is based on two main questions:

1. What is the impact of the divorce process in the psycho-social relations of the adolescent?
2. How does this impact influence the adolescents' learning process?

5. Conclusions

Considering the two research questions on which this study is based, it is concluded that the impact of the divorce process in the psycho-social relations of the adolescent is visible. This is mostly noticed in those adolescents who don't have good relations with their parents, or even when parents don't have good relations with each-other.

This impact affects the learning process, the adolescent has lower results at school and shows lack of concentration.

During the interviews I noticed that those adolescents whose parents were divorced when they were still very young children, have good relations with their parents and have no feelings of hatred or malice. Whereas, in the case the divorce happened when the child was grown up, the adolescents have tense relations with their parents. This is because they blame their parents for the situation in which they are. Most of them state that they have no communication with the divorced parent. They consider very far from them the presence of the father. "The hatred" they have created for him, is manifested in the way they communicate. They don't mention the word father, but name him or say "he". This makes you understand that the adolescent emotionally suffers from this fact.

5.1 *How much important is it for an adolescent to have good relations with both parents?*

Most of the persons interviewed say that it is very important. The involvement of both parents in his life makes him feel more secure for his own future. Despite the fact that the partners are divorced, for the adolescent they are both his parents. A good relationship between the parents after the divorce makes the adolescent feel better and more complete.

5.2 *What about the relation between the two ex partners?*

Being in the dilemma of on whose side to be the adolescents don't know how to react. This makes them behave in an inappropriate way and they themselves don't know how to react. Therefore, it is very important that the ex partners have good relations with each other, in order to stand close to the adolescent. 20% of those interviewed say that the parent with whom they live (mainly the mother) expresses a good opinion for the ex partner and this made it possible for the adolescent to have a positive opinion on him and his parental role. This makes him feel safe and evaluated by his parents. In those cases when parents don't have good relations, the adolescent tries to take the role of the mediator in order to improve things. Once he isn't successful in this he might become aggressive as well. We have the case of a 17 years old girl who tried to reconcile her parents. She was very often involved in conflict situations in the school environment, so the teacher would convene her parents. According to her, once the parents would come to the school, standing in front of each other they could reconcile. This thought was a great concern for her and made her feel powerless.

5.3 *What makes an adolescent react aggressively?*

Considering the interviews, I come to the conclusion that most of them react as a form of revenge to the parent. One of them says that this is the behavior they deserve. They didn't care about me, just for themselves. This is my solution. They say that the others can't understand me. These behaviors are affected by a certain number of factors, such as: the conflict situation in the family, economic difficulties (mainly when there are many children), the fear for the future, the opinion of their friends, how the others will react, etc. This makes them find a way to forget their problems. There are also cases where the adolescent doesn't accept his parents' divorce and during the interviews he thinks that this is just a period of contradictions between them, which very soon will be over.

5.4 *The impact this behavior has in the learning process.*

A large number of the adolescents have lower results at school. The reasons they state are various: lack of concentration because of the family unstable situation(ongoing conflicts), economic difficulties and the need to work in order to earn their own living, they don't see any green light for their own future, some of them consider this the end of the world, they think their future will be dark because they will be prejudiced by the others, etc. The absence of one of the parents at home makes them feel an internal emptiness that can't be filled by the other parent.

Another reason is their age. The adolescents of the age group of 14-15 years old are those who are impacted in their learning process. This is also the transition period from the 9 years school to the high school, when the adolescent

experiences great emotional and physical changes, in particular the boys. Their isolation, lack of communication with family members, with friends, the psychologist, etc. makes them unstable in their concentration.

Given the above mentioned circumstances we understand that if the divorce was in an early age, if the parents have good relations with each other, the adolescent has good relations with his parents, given the age of the adolescent (18 years old), he didn't have a drastic deterioration in the learning process. During the interviews it is noticed that most of the teenage girls have positive results at school. This is due to various reasons. One of the reasons is their future. They were grown up among economic difficulties, their mothers had to work a lot in order to earn their living, the adolescents consider school as the only alternative out of poverty. One of the girls interviewed says that now she is a grown up, she is the one "to make things function" and help her mother. If she has good results then she could have a good education which would in the future help her have very good incomes. It is worth mentioning that most of their parents have a high education. This made them face difficulties in the labor market. In order to not be just like them, the alternative is school, education. In our mentality boys are considered as a major economic support for the family. Overcoming the difficulties and accepting the reality, are two factors that affect their behavior. I came to the conclusion that not only boys overtake the role of the head of the family, but girls also are considered responsible for their own future and that of the family members.

Who are the persons who mostly support them during the learning process? Most of the adolescents answer that teachers are those who mostly support them during the learning process. The teacher, as an important person in their education process, play an important role by supporting them. Information on the situation, psychology and their problems make them stand very close to them and support them towards their future.

The school psychologist also plays an important role. During this phase adolescents need to speak with someone, and the best person would be the school psychologist. 65% of the persons interviewed say that they have contacted the school psychologist who greatly helped them overcome their difficulties. Communicating with the school psychologist made them feel better and understand how important school is. They rank as important they parent, the teacher and a special importance has the school psychologist. This is a way to speak out and to find a support. It is very impressive the opinion of an 18 years old girl, who considers the absence of her father not only an emotional absence, but also a financial absence. This indicates that the Albanian mentality still remains patriarchal and the father is considered as the main incomes resource.

The parents divorce process is associated with many problems. Both partners and their children have problems. It is worth mentioning that children of various age groups experience the divorce process in various ways. The age group of 14-18 years old understand the reasons of the divorce, but they are afraid of their own future, with only one of the two parents. In such a situation they have various behaviors, such as aggressiveness, depression, lack of communication, lack of concentration, lower results at school, etc. Good relations between the two parents after the divorce, social support, teachers and school psychologists play an important role in overcoming the adolescents' difficulties. This is mainly for the age group of 14-16 years old, who manifest the greatest problems. In the age of 17-18 adolescents start to better understand and take their own responsibilities.

References

- Dervishi, Zyhd: Gratë në syrin e ciklonit të sfidave dhe perspektiva, Botimet "Jeruzalem", Tiranë 2001.
- Dervishi, Zyhd: Bashkëjetesë me demonët e konflikteve, Botimet "Jeruzalem", Tiranë 2005.
- Beqja Hamid, Sokoli Lekë: Divorci. Vrojtime e refleksione, Botimet "Dudaj" dhe Rinia 2000", Tiranë 2001.
- Brian M. D' Onofrio, " Consequences of separation? Divorce for children." 2011
- Ibegwam Ahiaoma, "The psycho-social effect of parental separation and divorce on adolescents: Implications for counselling in Surulere Local Government Area of Lagos State" 2013.
- Nicholas H. Wolfinger, "Beyond the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce: Do people Replicate the Patterns of Marital Instability They Grew Up with?" 2000.
- Norval D. Glenn and Kathryn B. Kramer, "The Marriages and Divorces of the Children of Divorce".
- Tracie O. Afifi, Jonathan Boman, William Fleisher, and Jitender Sareen, "The Relationship between Child Abuse, Parental Divorce, and Lifetime Mental Disorders and Suicidality in a Nationally Representative Adult Sample," *Child Abuse and Neglect* 33 (2009).
- Hetherington, E. M., & Kelly, J. (2002). *For better or worse: Divorce reconsidered*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Maccoby, E., & Mnookin, R. H. (1992). *Dividing the child: Social and legal dilemmas of custody*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wallerstein, J. S., Lewis, J., & Blakeslee, S. (2000). *The unexpected legacy of divorce: A 25 year landmark study*. New York: Hyperion.
- Shapiro, A., and Lambert, J. D. (1999). "Longitudinal Effects on the Quality of the Father-Child Relationship and the Father's Psychological Well-Being." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 61:387-408.
- Kelly JB, Emery RE. Children's adjustment following divorce: Risk and resilience perspectives. 2003;52:352-362. *Family Relations*
- Lansford JE. Parental divorce and child adjustment. 2009;4:140-152. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*

- D'Onofrio BM, Turkheimer EN, Emery RE, et al. A genetically informed study of marital instability and its association with offspring psychopathology. 2005;114:570-586. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*
- D'Onofrio BM, Turkheimer EN, Emery RE, et al. A genetically informed study of the intergenerational transmission of marital instability. 2007;69:793-803. *Journal of Marriage and Family*
- Holtzworth-Munroe A, Applegate AG, D'Onofrio BM. Family dispute resolution: Charting a course for the future. 2009;47:493-505. *Family Court Review*
- Emery RE, Otto RK, O'Donohue WT. A critical assessment of child custody evaluations: Limited science and a flawed system. 2005;6:1-29. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*
- McLanahan S, Donahue E, Haskins R. Marriage and child Wellbeing. 2005;15:3-12. *The Future of Children*
- Kiernan K. European Perspectives on Union Formation. In: Waite LJ, Bachrach H, Christine M, Hindin E, Thompson E, Thornton A, eds. *New York: Aldine de Gruyter*; 2000:40-58. *The Ties that Bind: Perspectives on Marriage and Cohabitation*
- Casper LM, Bianchi SM. . Thousand Oaks, NJ: Sage Publications; 2002. *Continuity and Change in the American Family*